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ABSTRACT

St. Petersburg College (SPC) (Florida), formerly a two-year community college, now offers four-year degrees. This paper discusses the findings of SPC's evaluation question focusing on what the appropriate models are for St. Petersburg College and the University Partnership Center (UPC) to increase access to bachelor's and master's programs. Research fell into three categories: (1) two-year colleges that expanded to offer baccalaureate degrees; (2) community college and university partnerships; and (3) other ideas for increasing access to four-year degrees. Steps were then taken to determine what SPC has done to increase access. Staff investigated and examined the history of upper-level program development at SPC and current upper-level programs and practices of SPC. They also interviewed the vice president of the college's new four-year program and the UPC associate provosts about details and plans for the future. Results showed that: (1) SPC is one of a very small number of community colleges nationwide that has made the transition to a four-year institution; (2) the UPC is one of the largest of such ventures in the country; and (3) most of the innovative ideas found in an examination of colleges and universities nationwide have been or are being explored at SPC. (CB)

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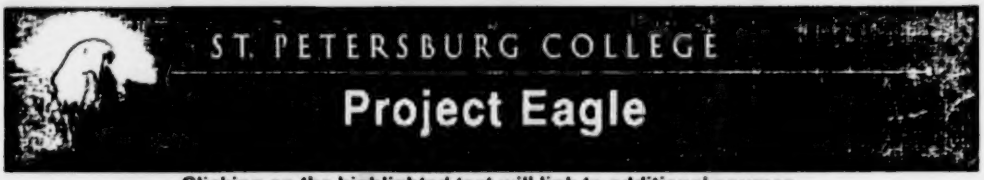

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Benchmarking St. Petersburg College: A Report to Leadership

Project Eagle Evaluation Question #5

What Are the Appropriate Models for St. Petersburg College and the University Partnership Center to Expand Access to Bachelor's and Master's Degrees?

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Introduction

To formulate an evaluation process of e-learning practices at St. Petersburg College (SPC) for Project Eagle, external evaluator Dr. Gordon "Spud" Van de Water, Education Commission of the States, suggested that the college first identify critical issues. Dr. James Olliver, Project Eagle director, with the help of the Project Eagle Work Group, formulated six questions, which were then worked into an evaluation plan by Dr. Van de Water and Joyce Burkhart, Coordinator of Research, Evaluation and Dissemination.

The decision was made to consider one question per quarter for the next 18 months, taking the following steps:

1. First, examine best e-learning practices related to that question, both nationwide and worldwide, using the Web as the primary source of information. The results of this external evaluation would be published in an issue of Project Eagle's monthly newsletter, Best Educational E-Practices (BEEP).
2. Next, compile a list of all practices related to the question currently in use at SPC, using a variety of appropriate techniques and strategies.
3. Compare the best external practices with those offered at SPC.
4. Benchmark SPC and submit a report to the college leadership on the college's performance in the area under consideration.
5. Finally, disseminate the results nationally, using the Project Eagle Web site and other forms of information distribution.

This report represents Step 4, incorporating the results of Steps 1-3.

Background

The fifth question to be evaluated dealt with ways to expand access to bachelor's and master's degrees. St. Petersburg College (SPC) was still a two-year institution when the question was originally formulated in October 2000, and the agency handling partnerships with universities was called the College and University Center (CUC).

Because the name of the CUC has been changed to the University Partnership Center and SPC can now offer its own four-year degrees, the wording of the original question has been changed to add SPC and change the name of the CUC to the UPC.

The original evaluation question was

"What Is the Appropriate Model for the College and University Center (CUC) to Expand Access to Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in the County?"

The revised question is

"What Is the Appropriate Model for St. Petersburg College and the University Partnership to Expand Access to Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in the County?"

In October 2001, research was completed to compile a list of ideas nationwide for such expansion. In November 2001, the results were published in *Best Educational E-Practices (BEEP), Number 14, "Providing Four-Year and Graduate Degrees in a Community College Setting."* The methods suggested for accomplishment fell into three categories:

A. Two-Year Colleges That Now Offer Baccalaureate Degrees

B. Community College and University Partnerships

C. Other Ideas for Increasing Access to Four-Year Degrees

From February to the middle of March 2002*, steps were taken to determine what SPC has done to increase access. These steps included the following:

1. Investigating the history of upper-level program development at SPC.

2. Examining current upper-level programs and practices of SPC and the UPC.

3. Interviewing the vice-president of the college's new four-year program about details and plans for the future.

4. Interviewing the UPC associate provost about program details and future plans.

In March 2002 external and internal results were compared and compiled in this report. An executive summary appears in *Best Educational E-Practices* (BEEP), Issue 19, April 1, 2002.

Completion of this report was originally scheduled for February 28, 2002, but the postponement of a previous Project Eagle Evaluation Question has pushed back the publication of each of the remaining reports by one month.

Results

A. Two-Year Colleges That Now Offer Baccalaureate Degrees

Nationwide/worldwide. The concept of a offering a bachelor's degree at two-year colleges has been and continues to be a controversial one, with a cover article(not online) on the debate in *Community College Week* as late as July 23, 2001. Nevertheless, a small but steady increase in the number of schools nationwide that offer four-year degrees is growing. A few years ago the Community College Baccalaureate Association, which publishes an online newsletter and holds an annual conference, was formed.

Recent publications that have spotlighted the concept were a 2001 report by the Task Force on Baccalaureate Education in the Community College and articles in *Community College Journal* and *Leadership Abstracts.* At the time of this report, there are probably less than a dozen two-year schools authorized to offer four-year degrees, but there are others who are actively pursuing the status.

Several that have achieved some notice for their programs are these:

1. Dalton State College (GA) has offered bachelor's degrees since 1999 in Industrial Operations Management, Management Information Systems and Applied Science in Technology Management.

2. Dixie State College (UT) was given a name change and baccalaureate degree status in 2000. It offers bachelor's degrees in Business Administration and Computer and Information Technology.

3. Louisiana State University at Alexandria was granted four-year status during the 2001 legislative session. The school plans to offer bachelor's degrees in elementary education, general business, general studies, biology, and nursing in the 2002-2003 school year.

4. Utah Valley State College, formerly known as Utah Valley Community College, had its name and status changed in 1993. It now offers bachelor's degrees in Business Management; Computer Science and Information Systems; Technology Management; Elementary Education; Hospitality Management; Accounting; Behavioral Science; Biology; Fire Services Administration; Paralegal Studies; Criminal Justice; Aviation Professional Pilot; and English.

5. Westark College (AR) was established by the state General Assembly as a "unique community college" in 1997. With its name just changed to University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, Westark is authorized to offer a degree in Manufacturing Technology Management, as well as seven others to be determined by demonstrated demand within the next four years.

SPC. The college changed its status from two-year to four-year and its name from St. Petersburg Junior College to St. Petersburg College in 2001. This change came when the Florida legislature approved SPC's proposal to offer bachelor's degrees in three areas: Education, Technology Management, and Nursing. The college is also authorized to add additional A. S. to B. S. degrees, but there are no plans to do so at present.

Nursing and technology were chosen based on the results of a study by the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission (PEPC) that identified critical shortages in the three-county area of Pinellas, Pasco and Hernando. The teacher shortage in Florida was at that time projected to be 162,000 in the next ten years.

More than 70 new upper-division courses will be created in the new programs. They will begin in August 2002, and total enrollment is expected to be between 500 and 600. Education classes will be hubbed at SPC's Tarpon Springs campus; Nursing at the Health Education Center in Pinellas Park; and Technology Management in Clearwater. The Technology Management program will be available both online and face to face immediately, and the others will eventually follow.

Even before SPC's first upper division class begins, several other Florida community colleges have submitted proposals to the state for similar status changes. At the time of this report, none had been granted, but the schools are expected to try again in the next fiscal year.

Administratively, both the three deans of the four-year programs and the associate vice-president in charge of the UPC report to a senior vice-president who administers all the college's four-year and graduate programs. This structure allows a coordination of future four-year offerings that will avoid any potential conflict between those of the UPC and those of SPC's baccalaureate initiative.

The new four-year programs were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in December 2001 and will be revisited in Fall 2002. SACS will also review the operation of the new program in five years, with emphasis on a smooth and seamless integration into the existing college structure.

Tuition will be higher than that presently charged for SPC's freshman and sophomore courses, but less than the university rate for junior- and senior-level courses. Unlike the open admissions policy of the community college, admission standards will be similar to upper-level programs in the university system.

Specifically, the four-year degree programs look like this:

1. **Education**. There are four bachelor of science degrees offered in Education: Elementary Education; Exceptional Student Education; Secondary Math; and Secondary Biology. About 400 students are expected to enroll in the first year, some immediately after high school and others with associate's degrees returning to continue their education.

2. **Nursing.** Known as the RN to BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing), this program targets individuals who are already registered nurses who wish to advance in their education and careers. About 100 students are expected to enroll in the first year.

3. **Technology Management.** The target market for this bachelor of applied science degree is someone with an associate's degree working in the field of computer science, engineering technology, and related technology who wants to come back and finish a four-year program. About 100 students are expected to enroll in the first year. In addition to general advertising of the degree, SPC administrators are contacting large local businesses and corporations, with the hope of support from those companies in the form of coop/internship experiences and, eventually, scholarships.

B. Community College and University Partnerships

Nationwide/worldwide. An examination of community colleges nationwide showed a growing number partnering with four-year colleges and universities. Such an arrangement proves advantageous to all parties, since it assures a student population for both schools.

Academic partnerships do not vary much from place to place. Sometimes a university will partner with a number of community colleges in its state, and the same is true for community colleges who partner with many universities. A few examples of successful partnerships can be found at the following institutions:

1. Arizona Western College. The college has a number of innovative partnerships within its community. One is with Northern Arizona University, in which the two schools share common campus and delivery sites to provide seamless associate-through-graduate-degree programs.

2. Edison College (FL). This Florida community college partners with Florida State University, International College (FL), National-Louis University (IL), Thomas Edison State College (NJ), and Florida Gulf Coast University.

3. Jefferson Community College (OH). This college partners with Franciscan University, Ohio University Eastern, and Youngstown State to offer courses for both bachelor's and master's degrees.

4. Lorain County Community College (OH). Extensive agreements with Ohio universities, including University of Akron, Ashland University, Cleveland State University, Kent State, Ohio State, Ohio University, University of Toledo, and Youngstown State University allow Lorain County to offer bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as post-graduate certificates.

5. Macomb Community College (MI). This college has the distinction of being one of the oldest and most extensively involved in partnerships. The state of Michigan approved the concept in 1988, and partnerships began in 1991. Bachelor's and master's degree programs are offered through eleven four-year colleges and universities.

6. North Harris Montgomery Community College District (TX). Offering bachelor's, master's and professional degrees, the college partners with Texas Southern University, Sam Houston State University, University of Houston, Prairie View A & M University, and Texas A & M University.

SPC. Begun in 1998, the University Partnership Center (UPC) is already one of the largest of its kind in the country. It has allied itself with 12 colleges and universities, private and public, within and outside the state of Florida. Presently, 30 baccalaureate and 14 graduate, including two doctoral programs, are offered.

The partner schools are these:

1. Private - Eckerd College, Embry-Riddle University, George Washington University, Saint Leo University.

2. Public - Florida A & M, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida Institute of Technology, Florida International University, Florida State University, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, University of South Florida.

Some of the same degrees may be offered by different institutions. Business Administration, for example, is offered in a traditional classroom format both by St. Leo, a private college and the University of South Florida, a public university. In addition, the University of Florida offers the same degree entirely online.

Nursing is offered by the University of South Florida in a traditional format and Florida State University online. (It is estimated that 40% of all the classes offered by the UPC are online.)

In terms of expansion, the UPC is selective in its new additions. Initially, UPC administrators contacted two universities, Florida State University and the University of Central Florida, and invited them to partner in two critically needed areas in Pinellas County, Nursing and Technology. After watching the success of these programs, other institutions began to contact the UPC, and the scope of its offerings has grown without a great deal of effort.

Presently, new programs are generally added by one of two methods:

1. UPC-identified areas of critical need. George Washington University, for example, was contacted to become a new partner because of the need in Florida for a four-year EMS degree, but the absence of an in-state school to offer it. The school will begin offering a blended program, part online, part traditional, in Fall 2002.

Similarly, existing partners may be asked to add degrees in critical areas. The University of South Florida, for example, has added bachelor's and master's programs in Social Work, and the University of Florida doctoral programs in Pharmacy.

2. New programs proposed by existing partners. An example would be the recent request by Florida Gulf Coast University, which currently offers Criminal Justice, Legal Studies and Health Studies, to add an online master's degree in Public Administration.

With the recent completion of the C. W. "Bill" Young University Partnership Building, the UPC now has the space and personnel needed to provide full service to its growing population. Some of the services, policies, and procedures for students are these:

1. Admissions. Students apply and are admitted to one of the 12 partner schools. That institution is identified as the "home Campus," even though all the courses are taught at the UPC. Each institution has its own advisor(s) who maintain office(s), full-time if necessary, at the UPC. There is also a UPC staff, who may be reached during normal business hours Monday-Friday.

2. Student services. Although not officially enrolled as SPC students, UPC students have access to all the college's services and facilities, including the library, testing center, computers and fitness rooms. Some UPC course partners put their textbooks in the SPC

bookstores, while others have their students use the Web site bookstore for that particular school. Each SPC campus has assigned a point counselor who is kept informed of all UPC activities.

3. Calendar and requirements. UPC classes operate according to the calendar of the schools offering them. UPC classes are not affected by differences of holidays, spring breaks or special closing dates of SPC. Students may be dually enrolled at SPC and the UPC, but the requirements for students entering the UPC program are determined by the university offering the four-year or graduate degree.

C. Other Ideas for Increasing Access to Four-Year Degrees

Nationwide/worldwide. Besides the usual offerings of academic degrees and certificates via community college/university partnerships, some schools have developed innovative and unique plans to increase access to four-year and other degrees:

1. Bridge programs. Bridges to the Baccalaureate Program. This is a program funded by the National Institutes of Health for minority students at selected New York community colleges who want to pursue science studies. Their ultimate destination is one of several New York state universities to complete a bachelor's degree in a biomedical or biomedically-related field.

A variation on New York's bridge program is Miami-Dade (FL) Community College's Science Career Bridge Program. This program that enables talented Miami-Dade Community College students to carry out scientific research at the University of Miami's facilities. Those who do well can complete their junior and seniors years free at the university.

2. Dual admission. Dual Admission and Partnership Between Near-By Area Community College and the State University Local Valley College. This is a report detailing a proposal for a unique Pennsylvania dual admission partnership between a community college and a university branch campus.

3. Military partnerships. Florida Community College at Jacksonville Navy College Rating Partners. This is an example of how one college is participating in a large Navy initiative to provide a streamlined, interlaced education plan from Navy "A" school to a bachelor's degree for Navy service members anywhere worldwide.

4. Reverse transfers. Reverse Transfers in the Community College. Community colleges can work with students who have already earned credits from a four-year institution, either before or after earning a baccalaureate.

5. Post-graduate certificates. Rio Salado's Online Program for Teacher Education. As an example of a community college offering post-graduate certification, Rio Salado College (AZ) boasts the first completely online teacher-certification program in the country.

6. Teacher recruitment programs. Texas A & M Partnership for Texas Public Schools. A unique statewide initiative began in 1996 to aid in the recruitment and education of teachers. Cooperative agencies and services exist at the secondary, community college, and university level.

7. Faculty development opportunities. University of California, Davis, University Partnership Program. This program between the university and area community colleges exists to enhance instruction in biology at the community college level. It features a sabbatical semester for community college instructors on the university campus.

SPC. Efforts similar to those underway nationwide have already been begun at the college in both of its upper-level initiatives.

The four-year baccalaureate program has been active in two of the areas mentioned above:

1. Military partnerships. SPC has recently submitted a request for proposal to eArmyu, the U. S. Army's effort to make online baccalaureate opportunities available to soldiers stationed anywhere in the world.

2. Teacher recruitment programs. SPC is working toward a model where students commit to employment in a school district within Pinellas, Pasco or Hernando counties. In return they receive the guarantee of a job upon completion of their bachelor's degree, as well as a scholarship. Because of recent uncertainties in the Florida economy, none of the arrangements with the counties has yet been finalized, but discussions are still underway.

The UPC has also generated activities in several of the areas found nationwide:

1. Bridge programs. Sponsored by the local Hotel and Restaurant Association, the college's Hospitality Management program is able to provide scholarships and support for students in its A.S. degree program. These students then go on to one of the partner schools, Florida International University, for their bachelor's degrees.

2. Reverse transfer programs. Although there are no formal arrangements between SPC and any of its university partners for working with students who have already earned credits from a four-year institution, the UPC has found that many of the students in its university programs take any needed prerequisite courses at SPC. This has provided a measurable amount of "residual enrollment" for the college and provided the UPC students with a convenient way to pick up courses they lack.

3. Post-graduate certificates. The UPC has recently begun its first post-graduate certificate program, offered by Florida State University in the field of Visual Disabilities. The courses are offered in traditional format, and the university has a full-time instructor employed at the SPC Seminole campus.

Review and Recommendations

SPC upper-level efforts are exemplary when compared to those currently underway nationwide:

A. Two-Year Colleges That Now Offer Baccalaureate Degrees. At the present time, SPC is one of a very small number of community colleges nationwide that has made the transition to a four-year institution. While some have made application, no others in Florida have been approved at this time.

The college planned its initiative very carefully: identifying areas of critical need, then working with local agencies and educational institutions to present its plans in a most positive, non-threatening light. The success of their efforts where others in the state have failed demonstrates the importance of knowing community needs and both informing and cooperating with others involved or impacted. These two factors seem to be very important for any two-year school to achieve four year-status.

The three bachelor's programs selected - Education, Nursing, and Technology Management -will provide needed opportunities for the Pinellas, Pasco and Hernando county population to further their education without the need for long-distance travel.

B. Community College and University Partnerships. SPC's University Partnership Center is one of the largest of such ventures in the country. With 1800 students currently enrolled in 30 baccalaureate and 14 graduate programs offered by 12 partnering institutions, the UPC's success speaks for itself.

Like SPC's recently approved four-year degree initiative, the UPC has been carefully planned. Critical need areas have been clearly defined before any new programs have been offered or additional partners approached.

With the completion of the UPC's new and impressive building, it has the capability to offer a full range of services to students, both present and potential.

C. Other Ideas for Increasing Access to Four-Year Degrees. Interestingly, most of the innovative ideas found in an examination of colleges and universities nationwide have been or are being explored at SPC. These include the following:

1. Military partnership - SPC has applied to be a participating institution with eArmyu.

2. Teacher recruitment program - A program is under discussion with Pinellas, Pasco and Hernando counties.

3. Bridge program - SPC's hospitality management program allows students to continue their studies at UPC partner Florida International University with support from the local Hotel and Restaurant Association.

4. Reverse transfer program - UPC students take needed prerequisite courses at SPC.

5. Post-graduate certificate - A Visual Disabilities certificate is offered by UPC partner Florida State University.

In a county in which access to upper-level degrees ranks 67 out of 67 in a state that ranks 49 out of 50, the college has taken four unique positive steps to turn the problem around:

1. Increasing access points throughout the county, including coursework at the St. Petersburg Campus of the University of South Florida.
2. Developing a large eCampus - Increasing opportunities by means of online course. SPC now offers the second-largest number of online courses in Florida, 165 this session.
3. Creating the UPC.
4. Changing the college's status to a four-year institution.

If it can coordinate and balance the diverse types of programs it is now able to offer, SPC will certainly be able to claim national model status in the area of improving access to four-year degrees.

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